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72 Dr. Smith

An

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Inaugural Dissertation

on the

Autumnal Fever

of

Greensville County

Virginia

For the Degree of M. D.

by

John G. Parham

1824.

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On the Autumnal Fever of Greensville Co. Virginia

This little county lies in the southern part of Virginia, bordering on the North Carolina line, and about one hundred miles above the seashore. The face of the country is generally level, somewhat hilly and broken in the western, but flat and swampy in the eastern parts. It is pretty thickly settled, the inhabitants generally in easy circumstances, and temperate in their mode of living.

As the disease of which I am about to speak, most commonly appears in the eastern parts of the county, I deem it necessary, to enter into a more minute detail with regard to its situation, and what I consider the most fruitful source of the complaint.

The lands are low and swampy, but rich, and liable to frequent inundations from

the overflowing of Mohemin river, which forms its northern boundary — This is a small stream, but subject to great freshets — a little rain producing an almost immediate rise, — and the lands being low, the water spreads to the distance of one or two miles from its banks. —

It is no uncommon sight at these times, to see the water running within a few steps of the doors of the inhabitants —

At the distance of one or two miles from the river, there is a sudden elevation of ten or twelve feet, and what is remarkable, this ridge continues through the whole extent of the county, preserving nearly the same distance from the waters edge throughout. —

On this elevation the inhabitants settle — for the twofold purpose of enjoying better health, and of preserving their parlour floors from the destructive influence of the

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muddy sediment, left on the recession of the waters; which, though it would prove highly injurious to them, serves to enrich the soil, and inspire the farmers with the belief, that their lands are inexhaustible —

Those inundations, I have described, (at certain seasons) are looked upon as favourable to health; — at others, they are viewed as the harbingers of destruction, — the forerunners of sickness and death. — 1st they are considered favourable, when they make their appearance in the winter, or early in the spring — And why, it may be asked, at these seasons, should they be viewed in that light? The reason is obvious. — Occurring at these periods, they remove the whole of the vegetable matter, that has been collecting during the preceding summer and fall; which, should it remain in the stagnant ponds, that are here numerous, would prove an abundant —

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source of marsh exhalations — but these freshets, coming on at this time, carry off the whole of this vegetable matter, and by thus removing the chief source of disease, must undoubtedly contribute to the preservation of health. —

But, it may be urged, that the stagnant water will prove as baneful as the matter carried off — This would certainly be the case, were the ponds to remain filled until the sickly season approaches; but the weather being generally dry, during the last spring, and first summer months, the water is evaporated, and the marshes are left perfectly arid, — and, when this happens there is seldom much sickness — Such, then, are the advantages derived from early inundations —, And the same may be said of rains, at these seasons — but, of this, I will treat hereafter. —

2ndly. The inundations are considered unfavorable —

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The disease, being overcome by these remedies, tonics were next used — and of these, the eupatorium perfoliatum was the chief — it was given in cold infusion; — prepared by pouring a pint of boiling water on an ounce of the medicine — it was then covered over, and suffered to stand until cool — Of this, a wineglassful was given pro re nata. — Other tonics, as the peruvian bark, &c were occasionally administered. — —

It was necessary to pay the strictest attention to diet, — allowing the patient nothing, but what was light, and of easy digestion. — —

By pursuing this course, the patient was generally restored to health, if the disease had been taken in time — but, if it had been suffered to continue several days without medical aid, it defied the powers of the art & terminated fatally in a short time. —

Finis.

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